'People began saying we had no direction' — JON LORD

RECORDING an album of rock did Deep Purple a lot more good than most people realize. It solved a lot of personal problems that arose as a result of the group's previous classic venture and put an end to a certain amount of snidey comments.

ROCK ALBUM SOLVED DEEP PURPLE RIFT

By RICHARD GREEN

Organist Jon Lord is more than pleased with the sales of "Deep Purple In Rock" but even more elated that people recognise the group for what it is.

"We were playing rock for years and when we did the concert with the orchestra people were saying I was on a classical kick," Jon told me. "They weren't coming up to me and saying it, they were saying it behind my back."

Though the performance at the Royal Albert Hall was a success and the resultant album did well, problems arise within the group.

"People began saying we had no direction, that first we played one thing and then another and this led to personal problems. There wasn't any argument within the group about doing the classical thing, but when the criticisms started, some members weren't happy," Jon explained.

Though Jon regrets all that as being behind Deep Purple now, the group is still going to give two more concerts with an orchestra — one during its current American tour and one later in Britain.

"We were offered the chance of playing with the Los Angeles Symphony Orchestra and it would have been churlish to turn it down," Jon went on.

"It's being conducted by Lawrence Foster . . . he's a young guy, only about twenth-eight, and he talks about people like Flock. He knows a lot about rock groups.

"Later in the year, probably late September, we're doing another concert with the BBC orchestra and that will probably be the last for at least a year. We had offers to perform the concerto in major cities round the world, but that would only have added to our problems at the time. Now we're all sorted out."

Without a major hit in this country, Deep Purple have become one of the most popular groups around and now earn good money. I asked Jon how they had achieved this position.

"We did six months concentrated effort, working non-stop to let people see us," he replied. "A lot of the popularity must be word of mouth — someone sees us and tells a couple of friends and next time they come and each tell a couple more. It goes on like that until thousands are mentioning the group and attracting more people to the gigs.

"I enjoy working myself. If we get a few days off, I sit around bored wondering what to do. here's plenty I could be getting on with but when I get the time I get restless to work again. I don't mind working five or six nights a week."

Maybe I had a premonition about what was going to happen at Plumpton when lead guitarist Ritchie Blackmore set fire to a column speaker, for I asked Jon how much Deep Purple relied on showmanship.

"I'd say about forty per cent maybe. Half the time, nothing's planned it's just spontaneous reaction to whatever we happen to be playing. When I throw my organ about it's just the emotion of the moment," he said.

Jon and I had been talking in the relaxing atmosphere of his publicist's London office, a far cry from the packed throng in the artists bar at Plumpton where I located vocalist Ian Gillan a couple of days later.

He agreed wholeheartedly with Jon on the classical and rock subjects, saying: "We're into rock, it's as simple as that. I know a lot of people thought we, or at least Jon, were showing a classical influence, but that was all wrong. If they take the trouble to listen to what we were doing before and what we're doing now then they'll know where we're at.

Does he find continual work tiring?

"Not really, when you realise what it can achieve," he commented.

DEEP PURPLE — classical concert brought its problems. L to r the group are: JON LORD, IAN PAICE, IAN GILLIAN, RITCHIE BLACKMORE and ROGER GLOVER.

"We purposely didn't go to America for a few months so that we could work more here and on the Continent and that paid off. The money went up and we got a lot of things together.

But we'll be cutting down on gigs after this American trip, just doing two or three a week but still getting round the country."